

COMMAND MISSIONS:

A Personal Story.

By Lt. General L. K. Truscott, Jr.
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Reviewed by
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THIS is an account of certain aspects of the European war by a man who had an intimate part in planning, preparing and executing American operations. General Truscott started the war as a member of Lord Mountbatten's Combined Operations Headquarters. He later helped plan the Casablanca landing, participated in the fighting at Port Lyautey and in Tunisia, was division, and later corps, commander in Italy and southern France and ended the war commanding the Fifth Army in the drive which liberated northern Italy. Of all of these missions, he writes authoritatively and vigorously, and his account of the fighting in Italy, in particular, is one of the best descriptions we possess of what has been called "the forgotten war."

The outstanding characteristic of this book, however, is its fair-mindedness. In his preface, the author tells us that he has "no great controversies to pursue, no individuals to condemn, no ally to castigate," and he shows that he means what he says by the way in which he handles such essentially controversial matters as the Dieppe raid, the initial American defeats in Tunisia and the operation at Anzio.

With regard to the first of these, he points out that, despite the heavy casualties suffered by the Allies, it is not fair to those who planned the raid to write it off as a failure. Much was learned about the techniques and equipment needed in assaulting an enemy-held coast which could have been learned in no other way and, because the lesson was learned well, Dieppe contributed to the success of later operations. In Tunisia also it is too easy to blame the setbacks upon failures of leadership or of co-ordination between the Allies, although such failures definitely played their part. The kind of war that had to be fought against Germany could not be learned on training fields in the United States, and it was inevitable that mistakes would be made in actual combat. The reassuring feature of the first American reverses was that they produced no feeling of inferiority to the enemy but rather a confident expectation—borne out by results—that next time things would be different.

In his discussion of the Anzio operation, Gen. Truscott has some hard things to say about over-estimation of the effect of the landings on the German command in Italy and failure to estimate the enemy's capacity to counter the assault; and he is critical also of Gen. Mark Clark's decision, made during the break-out from the beachhead, to advance upon Rome rather than to seek to block the withdrawal of the German Tenth Army. But he rejects the thesis that the operation as a whole was a strategic blunder and argues convincingly, on the basis of the losses in men and materiel suffered by the Germans and the disruption of their defensive plans, that it fulfilled its objectives.

Perhaps the most controversial matter discussed in these pages is the question as to whether the campaign in Italy should have received

greater attention in Allied councils and whether the invasion of southern France should have been cancelled in favor of clearing the Germans out of Italy and driving through the Balkans. Gen. Eisenhower, it will be remembered, insisted on the landings in southern France, arguing that Allied resources were insufficient to support two theaters in Europe, both with decisive missions. Gen. Truscott believes that a Balkan campaign might have produced a more favorable political situation in Europe after the war, but he is not as categorical about this as some other military writers have been. After all, he says, "Military concentration to gain the maximum effort is one of the first principles of war and a prerequisite on the road to victory. Secondary fronts are given the minimum of assistance to enable them to accomplish their essential tasks and complement the main effort. Thus, considered militarily, rather than politically, the over-all strategy was entirely sound."

The battle accounts which form the greater part of this volume are invariably easy to follow and exciting to read. They are interlarded with reflections upon command relations, co-ordination of weapons, troop training and morale problems which, it is to be hoped, will not be disregarded by officers who will be charged with other command missions in the future.

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